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SUBJECT: AU SUMMIT -- LIBERIAN PRESIDENT JOHNSON SIRLEAF UPBEAT
ABOUT LIBERIA'S FUTURE

This message is from USAU Ambassador Michael A. Battle

1. (U) January 30, 2010, 5:25 p.m.; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

2. (U) Participants:

United States
Under Secretary Maria Otero
Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson
NSC Senior Director Michelle Gavin
Ambassador Michael Battle
Special Advisor Nicole Goldin
AU Desk Officer Ryan Bowles (notetaker)

Liberia
President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Foreign Minister Olubanke King Akerele

3. (SBU) Summary: An upbeat President Johnson Sirleaf told U/S Otero and the U.S. delegation to the African Union (AU) Summit that Liberia is making great progress on its development agenda. She reported on her discussions with Guinean coup leader Dadis Camara, and agreed to consider associating Liberia with the Copenhagen climate change accord. End Summary.

4. (U) U/S Otero and the U.S. delegation met with Liberian President Johnson Sirleaf on the margins of the AU Summit. President Johnson Sirleaf warmly greeted the delegation, and provided an update on the current status of Liberia's development agenda.

Liberia's development agenda

5. (U) Turning first to peace and security, she noted that Liberia is at peace, and thanked the U.S. for providing training and mentorship for more than 2,000 Liberian soldiers. On December 31, Liberia took over responsibility for its armed forces development program, and will pursue offers of additional training from Nigeria, Ghana, and Benin. President Johnson Sirleaf expects that UN peacekeeping forces will be reduced to 8,000 this year, and hopes this level can be maintained.

6. (U) On economic issues, she said Liberia was affected by the global financial crisis, but is showing signs of recovery. Iron ore mining is restarting, and a large international agriculture company commenced operations on January 1. She hopes to get the private

sector on track by the end of 2010. Debt relief is on track, and Liberia is negotiating with two vulture funds, which bought some of Liberia's sovereign debt, to settle lawsuits. She planned to meet World Bank President Robert Zoellick during the AU Summit and planned to pressure him to turn commitments into cash that she can use for roads and schools.

¶17. (U) Youth unemployment is of particular concern, and President Johnson Sirleaf would like to focus more attention on vocational education programs. She asked for U.S. assistance on these programs, and A/S Carson agreed to explore what USAID could do.

¶18. (U) On the subject of governance and rule of law, President Johnson Sirleaf said she was fighting corruption and trying to create systems that remove discretion from Liberian officials. Executive branch officials are required to declare their assets; she hopes that the legislature will soon follow. The judiciary is still weak, but is improving. There will soon be two grand juries convened at any given time solely for corruption cases. She wants to work harder on decentralization to local governments.

¶19. (U) Although President Johnson Sirleaf's administration is not actively encouraging refugees to return because of concerns over Liberia's ability to absorb them, many are repatriating themselves voluntarily. Liberia is also receiving deportees, and is interested in U.S. programs (primarily in Latin America) which help governments re-integrate deportees after they arrive. U/S Otero offered to investigate options for Liberia.

¶10. (U) U/S Otero inquired about microfinance in Liberia, and President Johnson Sirleaf responded that some small programs in Liberia have shown promise. She said that one program had a 100%

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repayment rate among women. President Johnson Sirleaf noted how vocational and skills training are critically important complements to microfinance tools.

Guinea

¶11. (SBU) A/S Carson thanked President Johnson Sirleaf for her efforts on Guinea. She recently met with Guinean coup leader Dadis Camara in Burkina Faso, and said that she asked him to seek medical attention. According to President Johnson Sirleaf, Dadis is "not well." She asked him to call upon his people to support the transition, but said that he was afraid of what might happen to him as a result of the massacre on September 28. President Johnson Sirleaf asked the United States to support Camara receiving medical care and disappearing from public life somewhere outside of Guinea. She does not believe he will contest the election in Guinea. President Johnson Sirleaf said we need to get aid flowing now, create livelihoods for Guineans, and reduce tension in the country.

¶12. (SBU) Carson said the U.S. is committed to the process, and greatly appreciated Johnson Sirleaf's role. As the transition moves forward, Carson said we plan to provide funds for development, and will help to restructure Guinea's armed forces. We want to send personnel to participate in the assessment mission, and provide significant financial support to the election. President Johnson Sirleaf supported the idea of an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) monitoring group with 30-50 civilian and unarmed military personnel.

Liberian Elections

¶13. (U) President Johnson Sirleaf will run in the upcoming election, which she says is the most critical event in Liberia's transformation. She says the election must be free, fair, and competitive. Fraud or violence would take Liberia backwards.

Climate Change

¶14. (U) U/S Otero asked President Johnson Sirleaf if Liberia would associate itself with the Copenhagen climate change accord. She said they would seriously consider the accord, but noted the importance of Liberia's forestry sector and said she was disappointed with the lack of a robust forestry package.

African Union Leadership

¶15. (SBU) On the question of the next chairperson of the AU, USAU Ambassador Battle asked if President Johnson Sirleaf had any news about Libya's lobbying campaign for a second term. She said she thought "wisdom would prevail," and that the AU would continue with the rotating presidency system that it has used to date, however she did not disclose how Liberia would vote. (Note: A day after this meeting, the AU heads of state elected Malawi's President Mutharika as chairperson, thereby preserving the rotation system. End Note.)

¶16. (U) NSC Senior Director Michelle Gavin said that President Obama appreciated President Johnson Sirleaf's contribution at the lunch he hosted for sub-Saharan African heads of state in September. Gavin said President Obama hoped to meet President Johnson Sirleaf in Washington soon.

Haiti

¶17. (U) Liberia was one of the first African countries to contribute money to Haiti relief, and although it was a small donation of \$50,000, President Johnson Sirleaf was happy to have been able to prompt other African states to make their own, sometimes much larger, contributions. U/S Otero conveyed Secretary Clinton's thanks for the contribution.

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¶18. (U) U/S Otero, A/S Carson, and NSC Senior Director Gavin have cleared this message.

YATES